

Chapter I: The Quest for Women's Liberation

This research explores Mariama Ba's novel *So Long A Letter* as women's attempt to liberate themselves from traditional patriarchal culture, by defying and denying them. The novel is about Ramatoulaye and her friend Aissatou, who go against the tradition of male exploitation and liberate themselves. It explores the issue that despite being dominated in a patriarchal society, Ramatoulaye and Aissatou are still optimistic to form their identities struggling against the ill-treatment from the side of the society. The women are oppressed by culture, religion, society and by virtue of their position. Aissatou rejects these and slowly Ramatoulaye realizes she cannot rely on her family and society for support. Ramatoulaye decides to stay married, although it means rarely seeing her husband and knowing he is squandering money on a young girl. Her friend divorces her husband and eventually leaves the country to settle in the United States. In her letter, Ramatoulaye examines her life and of other women of Senegal.

The novel talks about the problems each society and family mostly faces. It is written with touching words and sentences, invites multiple re-readings and a wealth of interpretations. Some critics question Bâ's feminism noting that women are pitted against each other in this novel. But, Elenil Coundouriotis says that others are put off by what she calls class elitism in Bâ's novel because:

Bâ accurately describes the social, religious, and gender differences that can divide a people even as they strive to forge a strong new nation. They find Bâ sympathetic to all women, even the perceived enemies in the novel, the youthful new wives who displace the middle-aged women. In letting one woman eloquently tell the anguish of her

heartbreak, Bâ suggests that all women have important stories to tell and that their plight should be given a voice. (21)

Ba's vast experience provides her with raw material for her novels, which she wrote at the very end of her life. The international feminist movement added another layer to her consciousness. In her writings, one of her central concerns is the institution of polygamy, which often leaves married women with few legal rights. Many of her experiences are embedded in her novels and voices concerns on women's legal rights, education, polygamy and female genital mutilation.

Bâ is an inspiring figure for African women and is considered one of the most important African writers of the twentieth century. She illustrates that tradition and custom are against modernity, therefore inspires people to revise them. She is a crusader for the rights of women in strongly patriarchal world of Islamic West Africa. Her works mention the psychological damage done to African women that captures the conflicts that arise in many African societies. She feels Africans struggle to reconcile their traditional cultures with influences brought by their European former colonizers. She writes in French, which is used in much of West Africa to bridge the divide between the area's various indigenous languages.

Bâ takes us through the life of Ramatoulaye, a woman who thought herself happily married, until her husband took a second wife. This forces her to reevaluate her entire way of thinking about her world, her family, her friends experience and her husband. Thus, Brian Mac Skill writes that:

Ba has created a fascinating look at postcolonial life in the former French West Africa. This portrait is decidedly from a woman's perspective and is focused on issues that particularly impact women's lives. Ba explores a multigenerational web that links women and men

together. Her subject matter includes motherhood, marriage, religion, education, and politics. She teaches us about surviving loss and disappointment. It is also about hope and personal growth. (19)

In the novel, the husband is expected to provide for the wife and children, whereas the wife is to assume the role of a housewife and mother to their children. Her husband, Modou seems to have forgotten his role as a protector of his family after his marriage to Binetou. He simply gives up, without giving it a second thought. He forgets without regretting his twenty two years of marriage to Ramatoulaye, commitment to their children and moves on with his life with Binetou.

Modou takes the help of religion that provides for having more than one wife which is an already existing cultural tradition. But what he did not draw from his understanding of his religion is the part where each of his wives has to be treated equally. Ramatoulaye is left alone to provide for twelve children while her husband who is sworn by the laws of his religion to take care of them is trying to recapture his youth at the expense of an innocent young girl, Binetou, young enough to be his daughter. Therefore, the main protagonist of the novel, Ramatoulaye and her friend Aissatou has been deceived by bringing a second wife by their husbands. Though they are ill-treated by their husband and society, both are struggling against the societal attitudes in the hope of bringing the light of happiness in their life.

Critics and readers of Ba's works have always recognized the attraction of her writing style, and her capacity to transform everyday events into sacred moments of beauty. She wrote in an honest manner and conveyed her stories with a style that employed spontaneity. After its publication *So Long A Letter* has undergone immense criticism. Some critics have considered the novel to be derogatory where as some others have appreciated the novel as a beautiful work. Katherine Frank does not

acknowledge a difference between demonstrating that a woman's worth is not inextricable from her relationship with men, that a woman can take care of herself, as Ramatoulaye discovers, and an actual desire to live a life without men. She mentions that:

In many Islamic cultures women are considered a curse to their families from adolescence to adulthood. Ramatoulaye does not receive the same type of respect that her male counterpart receives. Her only purpose, if any, is to reproduce and care for them. Most women in these types of societies are looked upon as second rate citizens in the eyes of their male counterparts. Their existence is mainly for the gratification of the male. (148)

While feminist criticisms continue to broaden the literary canon by bringing literature of African women to critical attention and continue to address the representation of African women in literatures, the methods used by such criticism in relation to African literatures continue to evolve. Sara Suleri talks about the treatment of Third World women and Muslim woman in particular to get a feel of what Muslim women have to endure like:

Ramatoulaye is on her own with her children, as she has been for years. She is a school teacher and has always contributed financially, only to have that money taken to be used for the new wife. We can see that she is hurt and upset, and she does not know how to react. More and more we see how the customs of the culture being adhered to pushes women aside and does not give them rights or a voice. (759)

The society needs to understand the difference between what females would naturally do in the world, and what women have been told they need to do for all of history.

Diana Don feels that it has been too long to have told women what is expected of them as:

The book is full of subtle advice for women, families and people in general. But it is given through example and reflection rather than through admonition. The way *So Long A Letter* goes about presenting the condition of women in restricting social circumstances to the reader is distinctively different than the way it is done in other novels. It is a true testimony to the women it represents and their never failing struggle to survive for themselves and their family. (57)

This novel is a brief, delicate, perfectly balanced piece of literature. Ba winds through past and present, connecting the two in just the way our minds really do when we are thinking aloud. Cheryl Johnson points out that *Ramatoulaye* gives one fictional woman her own beautiful voice, her own place to stand. Again and again she loops back to what she finds important, her own choices. Whether these choices will be different for other women in the future she cannot say because:

Sometimes it is very difficult for Westerners to understand how women in cultures with even more tightly regimented gender roles have not fallen victim to massive revolts by women grown sick and tired of being forced to do all of the things that women are typically told they have to do. *Ramatoulaye* makes readers think differently because she writes of the dedication that it takes to operate a household efficiently and how much the women that carry out these duties need praise. (32)

Kumkum Sangari writes that *Ramatoulaye* realizes that she was obeying and depending on her husband and following the societal norms and urges all the other

woman to unite and be independent of a man that does not appreciate a woman.

Through her, Ba feels that:

Many women throughout the world think that caring for children is the mother's responsibility, but deny the role of "woman" that is forced upon them. Ramatoulaye would say that treating people equally means that one does not expect different things from different people based solely on gender. It means expecting a woman to do what she wants, be it homemaking or working with the general population, and respecting that decision and that position for what it is, without abusing the privileges that woman's decision bestows. (86)

The Islamic aspect of the novel shows the men of the story interpreted their own meaning of the Islamic laws to satisfy their own selfish needs. A prime example of this is when Ramatoulaye is told about her husband's second wife. Although, Gerald MacLean says that all the messengers were influential men in the village, they showed no tact in their explanation because:

They simply passed it off as something God wished; as something that Ramatoulaye should accept it with no questions asked. As I stated earlier, many African societies had strong cultural and traditional ways that influenced how one viewed or understood the religion of Islam. Therefore the acts of cultural traditions are often mistaken for Islam. (193)

This study is divided into three chapters. The first chapter deals with an introductory aspect of the study. It incorporates the thesis title clarification, hypothesis elaboration, and claim of the research. The second chapter deals with the analysis of the novel. Here feminism as a theory is applied along with textual evidence to prove my claim

that argues “Resisting Within Patriarchy in *So Long a Letter*.” For instance with different criteria of justification and different emphasis on logic and imagination, characterize male and female attempts to understand the world. Such concerns include awareness of the masculine self-image. It is itself a socially variable and potentially distorting picture of what thought and action should be. The concept of male hegemony is not new in a patriarchal society. Women in society consciously or unconsciously consent to their subordination before males. They are encouraged freely to choose their inferior status and accept male exploitation as natural. History is only male centered and women are completely absent. The concept of history for women is inappropriate and hit hard the male centered biased attitude. The final chapter concludes the research work. With the analysis of the text done extensively in the second chapter, it tries to prove my hypothesis stated in the thesis proposal.

Chapter II: Resisting Within Patriarchy in *So Long a Letter*

The novel *So Long A Letter* by Ba critiques male dominated African Muslim communities by presenting two rebellious characters, Ramatoulaye and her friend Aissautou. The characters challenge the so called culture, a male construction by defying it and appropriating it on their ways. The two women have married for love and have had happy, productive marriages. They are educated, have work they enjoy and are intellectually alive. But in the course of their lives, both of their husbands chose to take a second wife and each woman then made a different choice. The theoretical position of this chapter will incorporate a combination of elements within the feminist debate, with the hopes of addressing the unequal and often violent relationships between men and women, in which women's subordinate position in society is perpetuated by the ideological production of gender.

Ramatoulaye decides to stay married, although it means rarely seeing her husband and knowing that he is wasting money on a young girl. Her friend divorces her husband and eventually leaves the country to settle in the United States. In her letter, that is the novel, Ramatoulaye examines her life and decisions with that of Aissautou, along with other women of Senegal. Her letter is decidedly from a woman's perspective and is focused on issues that particularly impact women's lives. She explores a multigenerational web that links women and men together. Her story deals much with women's relationships. It is about their husbands, children and adult female relatives and with friends. It is about surviving loss and disappointment but is also about hope and personal growth. She thinks that freedom of choice in marriage would result in harmonious co-existence in the community and probably put an end to gender oppression in Africa and the world as a whole.

Masculinity as a Form of Male Domination

The signs of transition in the gender order are everywhere and the impact on men and masculinity is very dramatic. In many respects these changes are interpreted through two perspectives: men as victims and men as under-achievers. Masculinity is manly character or manliness. It specifically describes men as personal and human. Due to gender difference men control the public and private world. The patriarchal ideology exaggerates biological difference between men and women, making certain that the former always have the dominant or masculine role and the latter have the subordinate. This ideology becomes the tool for men to oppress women. Men with superior concept of masculine gender oppress women through institution such as academy, the church and the family. Each justifies and reinforces women's subordination to men with the result that most women internalize a sense of inferiority to men.

Masculinity has its roots in genetics. Therefore while masculinity looks different in different cultures, there are common aspects to its definition across cultures. Anthropology has shown that masculinity itself has social status, just like wealth, race and social class. Men who practice masculinity exhibit their masculinity through fighting and violence. And some of that fighting and violence is visited upon by their loved ones. While physical violence is probably one of the more obvious by-products of masculinity, the emotional damage takes its toll as well. Several men begin to cry as they talk about their masculinity. The social pressure on men and women to adopt these behaviors is embedded in nearly every institution of society. They prevent alternative possibilities so that when a woman behaves aggressively, instead of re-defining female behavior, she is labeled a masculine. Talking about the dominating tendency of patriarchy, I. M. Young argues:

A patriarchal society defines woman as an object, as a mere body. An essential part of the situation of being a woman is that of living the ever present possibility that one will be looked upon as a mere body, as shape and flesh that presents itself as the potential object another subject's intentions and manipulations, rather than as a living manifestation of action and intention. (172)

In most cultures, greater masculinity usually brings greater social status. An association with physical or moral strength is implied. Masculinity is associated more commonly with men than with boys. The relative importance of the roles of socialization and genetics in the development of masculinity continues to be debated. While social conditioning obviously plays a role, it can also be observed that certain aspects of the masculine identity exist in almost all human cultures. But feminism as a political movement awakens women about their miserable existence in the male governed patriarchal society, because of sex difference. By making women conscious of the female about their precarious situation, this movement helps women gain not only legal, political and economic liberties and equalities but also sexual ones. Like feminism, there are varying degrees of masculinity that differ among, and even within, such identifiers as sex, class, race, age, sexual orientation and so on.

While women share certain commonalities, women's issues differ according to class, ethnicity, race, religious and cultural norms. Many years ago, Beauvoir wrote that woman is not regarded as an autonomous being. Humanity is male and that male defined women. Every institution from culture through ideology to literature is all male. So, feminist writers attack this notion of patriarchy to awaken women about the discrimination imposed upon them. Even the words, 'feminists' and 'feminism' are political. These two terms indicate support to the women's movement which emerged

in the late 1960s. But it is not uncommon nowadays to hear arguments for gender equality. Nor is it uncommon to see media images misrepresenting the feminist movement as a monolithic entity. This in actuality is a movement comprising of diverse people with often-conflicting ideas.

Ba's novel focuses on polygamous male characters and their various motivations. As the novel begins, Ramatoulaye is beginning a letter to her friend Aissatou. The occasion for writing is the former's recent widowhood. She talks about the stress of being a working mother trying to support her household and twelve children, especially after her husband abandons her for a second wife. Ramatoulaye decides to stay married. It means never seeing her husband and being humiliated and ashamed by the fact that he is squandering money on a young girl, who is a friend of their daughter. Her husband's second marriage functions more like a total abandonment of her and her children. In her series of letters, Ramatoulaye exposes her life and that of other women of Senegal. She talks about their upbringing and training and the cultural restrictions placed upon them. On the other hand, Aissatou divorces her husband and leaves Senegal, presently residing in the United States. Ramatoulaye is nostalgic and remembers her time with Aissatou saying:

And you left. You had the surprising courage to take your life into your own hands. You rented a house and set up home there. And instead of looking backwards, you looked resolutely to the future. You set yourself a difficult task; and more than just my presence and my encouragements, books saved you. Having become your refuge, they sustained you. (32)

A woman like Binetou becomes a pawn for the useless destructive adult games. This ends up negatively affecting the educational and experiential development of the

children. It distorts the institution of marriage and compromises the moral integrity and judgment of individuals. Although only the specific offense of Tamsir's action is named here, the larger wrong is that society allows such practices to take place. But she raises her voice in protest against patriarchal tyranny by refusing categorically to marry her late husband's brother:

My voice has known silence for thirty years; thirty years of harassment. You forget that I have a heart, a mind that I am not an object to be passed from hand to hand. You don't know what marriage means to me: it is an act of faith and of love, the total surrender of oneself to the person one has chosen and who has chosen you. (58)

The novel shows both women's experience with polygamy. It portrays the hurt, anguish and suffering of a woman after her husband takes a second wife.

Ramatoulaye talks about the pain the family goes through when her husband broke off all ties and abandoned his children. She mentions of the hurt and embarrassment her oldest daughter suffers when she finds out that her best friend's 'sugar daddy' is her father. She also mentions the story of Aissatou, who packs up her belongings, takes her four boys, and leaves her husband when he marries the second time. Aissatou later educates herself through books, goes to the School of Interpreters and works for the Senegalese Embassy in the United States.

Therefore, Ramatoulaye and Aissatou are victimized by the traditional customs that deny women status equal to that of men. These women became exploited sexually for their subservient duties. They take care of all household responsibilities and family obligations. They and not Modou have the duty to make certain everything runs smoothly at home. And once he passes away Ramatoulaye, "In addition to her former duties, she took over Moudou's as well" (51). Modou makes both his first and

second wives only subservient beings that would take care of all of the duties and comforts necessary for males. Aissatou's husband, for example, is forced on to marry again by his mother, who is offended that she is of such low birth. Thus, we see that the book is a celebration of female friendship and Ba depicts the ways in which women participate in each others' oppression.

Patriarchy and Female Harassment

Feminism is political in nature. It concerns itself with the marginalization of all women. Feminists disagree with the inferior role inflicted upon them by patriarchal culture. They talk about, how to unmask the culture and challenge it through literary texts. Feminist criticism includes a great variety of practices. English feminist criticism is oriented to textual interpretation. Nevertheless, nearly all feminist start from one fundamental perception that is, recognition of the patriarchal structure of society, that the world is organized by men for the advantage of men feminists examine the experience of diversities life of women from all races and classes and cultures. Talking about the discrimination towards women by patriarchal culture and society Toril Moi writes, “Feminist criticism, then, is a specific kind of political discourse, a critical and theoretical practice committed to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism not simply concern for gender in literature” (204).

Feminism is a theoretical discourse advocating women's rights based on belief in the equality of the sexes. This movement is committed to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism. The growing feminist movement sought not only to change society's prevailing stereotypes of women as relatively weak passive, docile and dependent individual but also to eliminate the subordination, oppression, inequalities and injustices women suffer because of their sex. Simone de Beauvoir states in her *Reawakening* that female sex has been subordinated through out time and contends

what Aristotle and St Thomas made their definition about women saying, “The female is female by virtue of a certain with a natural defectiveness”, said Aristotle (144). And St. Thomas pronounced women to be an “imperfect men” an “incidental” being which symbolized ‘Eve’ made from “a supernumerary bone” of Adam, as described in Genesis (144). While feminism takes many forms and cannot be characterized in any seamless way, it nonetheless encompasses the struggles of women to secure their economic and political agency. It is typically associated with particular historical moments when a coalition of women succeeds in bringing issues of gender equality, sexual oppression and sex discrimination into the public arena. Whether it takes the form of an explicit demand for the vote or a more generalized demand for women's freedom, third world feminism is invariably engaged in resistance to prevailing notions of women’s nature.

The quest for a more pluralistic feminism creates somewhat of a paradox, as advocates of the feminist movement profess solidarity for women worldwide. This cultivates a sense of sisterhood and common oppression, while at the same time seeking to incorporate the multiplicity within women’s experiences. Put differently, while feminists argue that the patriarchal social structure is one in which women are systematically dominated, exploited and oppressed, at the same time, they are also realizing that patriarchy and its manifestation can only be understood within cultural and historical contexts. In a patriarchal society, men defy women as ‘other’ and men as universal because of sex difference. The patriarchal ideology exaggerates biological difference between men and women making certain that men always have the dominant or “masculine” role and women the subordinate. This ideology became the tool for the men to oppress women. Men with superior concept of masculine gender oppress women through institution such as academy, the church and the

family. Each justifies and reinforces women's subordination to men with the result that most women internalized a sense of inferiority to men. Feminists insist that the root of women's oppression is buried deep in patriarchy, in sex/gender system. They maintain that masculinity is performed in a multitude of ways. Like, hegemonic masculinity is behavior modeled on the actions of stereotypical Hollywood men like Bruce Willis and Arnold Schwarzenegger. Their social practices embody toughness, competitiveness and self-reliance.

In a patriarchal society, sexual differences cause sexual discrimination and repression. Because of the biological differences women have been compelled to lead a poor life. The sexual difference forced women to remain within the four walls of a house. The patriarchal society has its own norms, values and culture. By imposing these norms, values and culture upon women, they dominated the women. Patriarchal attitudes and male interpretation in literary feminism is concerned both with representation of women in literature and with changing women's position in society by freeing them from oppressive restraints. Unjustified is the condition under which most women live. So, feminists are ultimately in pursuit of a more radical change for enlightening women of a patriarchal society that exploited women from a long history in the name of sex differences.

The novel deals with male-female relations in patriarchal society, the tradition of polygamy and its effects on modern African family where the act of polygamy is the main focus. It is a keen portrait of a society in transition where several strands come together at Moudou Fall's funeral. Ramatoulaye's letter recounts the funeral's aftermath, as well as the events leading up to her husband's departure till his death. Ramatoulaye's is a teacher, has 12 children, and has combined European-style education with a traditional life. Her husband decides to take on a second wife

without her knowledge. Aissatou knows all too well what Ramatoulaye is experiencing. She also has to deal with this heartbreaking ordeal when her husband decides to take on a second wife. But unlike Ramatoulaye, this does not go well with Aissatou. Despite her Islamic background, she decides to leave the village and her problem behind. Aissatou's example inspires Ramatoulaye, who must in her own life deal with the consequences of polygamy. The novel exposes the double standard between men and women in Africa.

This novel is widely considered as one of the first female-authored francophone novels structured around modern feminist themes. I. Gorak lays emphasis and says that Bâ juxtaposes male behavior based on sexual instincts and female continence and rationality. Her protagonist is a strong-willed character, who finds support from women's solidarity because:

The book is full of subtle advice for women, families and people in general. But it is given through example and reflection rather than presenting through admonition. The way the book goes about the condition of women in restricting social circumstances to the reader is distinctively different than in other novels. It is a true testimony to the women it represents and their never failing struggle to survive for themselves and their family. (7)

While Ramatoulaye gives her friend the details of her husband's death, she sets off on a journey of remembering the major events in her and Aissatou's lives. It traces her story and recounts how her husband, Moudou, betrays their marriage by taking a young second wife. For a moment she thinks of leaving him but then decides to stay in her marriage, preparing for equal sharing, according to the precepts of Islam concerning polygamy life. Religion instructs that men should consider marrying

multiple women only if they are capable of dealing justly with all of them. This includes providing for them financially, which Ramatoulaye's husband certainly does not do.

Sanctioned by the laws of Islam, Modou's action is a calculated betrayal of her trust and abrupt rejection of their life together. She records her anger at both Moudou and the customs that allow polygamy in her long letter. She questions how Aissatou's marriage is ruined, also by polygamy. Polygamy was and is the exploitation of women. This system is to the benefit of male sexual needs than those of women. It disregards what is important to women. If a woman is unhappy in this relationship, some people look at her as being demanding and disrespectful to her husband. Polygamy causes a lot of unnecessary pain to families and here Ramatoulaye frustratingly says:

I was irritated. He was asking me to understand. But to understand what? The supremacy of instinct? The right to betray? The justification of the desire for variety? I could not be an ally to polygamic instincts. What, then, was I to understand? Thus, for the sake of variety, men are unfaithful to their wives. Driven to the limits of my resistance, I satisfy myself with what is within reach. (34)

Although polygamy is acceptable in Senegalese society, the two women are dazed by their husbands' actions. While polygamy may be an African or Muslim custom that sometimes has its defenders even among women, the situation for an older, educated woman is anything but happy. It is because they have had meaningful relationships with their spouses and their reactions are markedly different.

Polygamy fulfills specific functions that are remote to defining the sexual preference of a male. It enhances productivity. For example, the larger a family the

larger the portion of land they are able to cultivate. It makes hunting more efficiently conducted, cattle rearing are better organized, and food production is enhanced. There are other subtle functions such as, the symbolism of having many children, the display of status, and in certain contexts just complying with tradition. Modou avoids her, and spends his money on Binetou, his second wife. Ramatoulaye fills her days with female duties. She purchases basic food items, takes care of the house, pays electricity bills and also overcomes her shyness and goes alone to cinemas. She does not reject the Islamic faith because, “my heart concurs with the demands of religion” (41), she confesses. When her daughter want to wear trousers, she first condemns the idea saying, “Trousers accentuate the ample figure of the black woman and further emphasize the curve of the small of the back” (63). She also vents her anger on how Aissatou's marriage is ruined, also by polygamy. She records her anger at both Moudou and the customs that allow polygamy in her long letter to her friend as:

I had heard of too many misfortunes not to understand my own. There was your own case, Aissatou, the cases of many other women, despised, relegated or exchanged, who were abandoned like a worn-out or out-dated *bouou*. A woman draws from the passing years the force of her devotion, despite the ageing of her companion, a man, on the other hand, restricts his field of tenderness. (44)

Ramatoulaye writes of how Modou has completely forgotten his first family and spent all of his time with Binetou. She writes of her struggles to encourage her children to continue to respect their father regardless of circumstances. This is a very hard struggle for her older children who had grown up with Binetou.

Although Ramatoulaye is heart-broken with how Modou and Binetou have no regard for her feelings when they decide to venture into their cohabitation. It shows

that Moudou sought only his individual gain in taking a second wife and willingly sacrifices his first wife and family. In her letter, Ramatoulaye thinks deeply about why Moudou forces her into the awkward position of co-wife after twenty two years of marriage and twelve children. She must raise her children alone with all the extreme difficulties that one has to face in life. But, she is obviously grateful for her children. About motherhood, Ramatoulaye states:

And also, one is a mother in order to understand the inexplicable. One is a mother to lighten the darkness. One is a mother to shield when lightning streaks the night, when thunder shakes the earth, when mud bogs one down. One is a mother in order to love without beginning or end. One is a mother so as to face the flood. I was the one who had not been equal to the situation. (83)

Later he sacrifices both Ramatoulaye and Binetou. When he leaves Ramatoulaye, he makes her “utterly destitute, who would need material support” (7), for he spent then on Binetou what he should have given to his first wife and children. He “bought the new off-the-peg dresses to replace the old faded ones, and gave the villa, the monthly allowance, the offer of a future trip to Mecca for her parents” (39).

But it was not smooth with Binetou, because she too suffered. Modou and Binetou’s mother made Binetou, “a lamb slaughtered on the alter of affluence” (39). For example, Binetou's marriage to Modou illustrates blind devotion to traditional materialism. She feels caught in a double blind when she agrees to marry Modou. She does not wish to suffer for the rest of her life married to an old man. But at the same time, she does not want her mother to hate her for not giving her a rich and easy old age:

Her mother cried so much. She begged her daughter to give her a happy ending in a real house that the man promised them. So she agreed. Modou sends his thanks. He says it is fate that decides men and things. God intended him to have a second wife, there is nothing he can do about it. What is important is Binetou herself. She must not give in. (72)

Binetou gives up her youth and her freedom to remain with the young and to marry someone close to her own age so that she could provide for herself and her family. She “would watch with a disillusioned eye the progress of her friends. The image of her life, which she had murdered, broke her heart” (50). But Modou Fall and Binetou's mother neither saw nor cared about the sacrifice of Binetou. Both relished only their own, individual gain.

Her most hurtful moment is when she receives a message that Modou has passed away from a heart attack. At that time she has forgotten her problems and her heart goes out to Binetou. Ramatoulaye writes to her dear friend Aissatou that her problems that seem at the time to be greater than the tallest mountains are really only ant hills. Binetou is now and always is the one with the true problems. A woman then trapped into a marriage to a man twice her age is now a woman who has lost her security blanket and needing to start over at only nineteen years of age. In a very touching language she writes:

The presence of my co-wife beside me irritates me. She has been installed in my house for the funeral, in accordance with tradition. With each passing hour her cheeks become more deeply hollowed, acquire ever more rings, those big and beautiful eyes which open and

close on their secrets, perhaps their regrets. At the age of love and freedom from care, this child is dogged by sadness. (4)

Through all of her pain, Ramatoulaye's heart goes out to Modou's new bride, Binetou, who she felt would suffer more in the long run. In Binetou, Ramatoulaye could see herself as a young girl starting out in life with the pressure of poverty and seeking desperately to find a way out. But unlike Ramatoulaye, Binetou is a young girl of nineteen who is almost forced into the decision of marriage to a man twice her age.

In her letter, she writes how she has given Modou twenty-two years of her life along with twelve children and he just decides that he wants something new and younger. Not only is the new wife younger, but a classmate of their oldest daughter, which is another stab in the heart. She mentions of how his neglect for her feeling and the feeling of their children almost destroys their lives. She feels that the sanctions of her religion, Islam, are too strong to allow her to that, not to mention having twelve children to care alone. She tells of how she wishes she has the strength of her friend to just walk away and begin a new life as she writes:

How I envied your calmness during your visit! There you were, rid of the mask of suffering. Your sons were growing up well, contrary to all predictions. You did not care about Maudou. Yes, indeed, there you were, the past crushed beneath your heel. There you were an innocent victim of an unjust cause and the courageous pioneer of a new life.

(36)

This story is particularly touching because Ramatoulaye's husband, before and during the early stages of their marriage, did not show her any signs that he would be unfaithful. In fact, the educated, respectful young man seems very promising. Ramatoulaye's mother is the only one who is skeptical about their relationship.

Somehow this presents the argument that had she listened to her mother about Moudou, she would never have been in this lonely and difficult situation.

After Moudou's untimely death and following the rituals of her Muslim faith, she must remain in seclusion for a long period of time. This seclusion is broken by the ritualized visits of relatives and friends of the dead man. During the first days, she must share her home with Binetou, her co-wife. This young woman is the same age as her oldest daughter. Both of them sit in state to welcome the visitors. The visitors bring money to these women out of respect for the dead. But ultimately their in-laws, Moudou's siblings and parents, take the money away from these widows. For example, his brother, Tamsir, uses tradition and religion as a justification to marry his late brother's wife:

Today is not a happy day. Therefore accept this money, you worthy widows of a worthy man. When you have come out (that is to say, of mourning), I shall marry you. You suit me as a wife, and further, you will continue to live here, just as if Modou were not dead. Usually, it is the younger brother who inherits his elder brother's wife. In this case, it is the opposite. You are my good luck. I shall marry you. (7)

Here we see how the society of Ramatoulaye functions as though all wives come from a lower economic class than their husbands. One common thread binds the experiences of both the abandoned wives. It is the antagonistic role of their in-laws in the process of abandonment. Here, is the role of the mother-in-law in turning around and confusing the head of their married son for personal material gain and social profit. They become victims of male lust and vanity and victims of female greed and rivalry. Though feminism's relation to other struggles for political liberation has always been an element of its self-understanding, this has become particularly salient

in recent years as feminism is increasingly exposed as beholden to a pernicious set of assumptions about class, race, sexuality, ethnicity, and nationality. Feminism has been challenged to re-think the centrality of a unified and singular woman's identity to its political aspirations, since that identity too often comes at the expense of other, equally significant forms of identification.

Muslim Theological Beliefs

The term culture generally refers to patterns of human activity and the symbolic structures that give such activities significance and importance. Cultures can be understood as system of symbols and meanings that even their creators contest, that lack fixed boundaries, that are constantly in flux, and that interact and compete with one another. Different definitions of culture reflect different theoretical bases for understanding, or criteria for evaluating, human activity. Culture can be defined as all the ways of life including arts, beliefs and institutions of a population that is passed down from generation to generation. Culture has been called the way of life for an entire society. As such, it includes codes of manners, dress, language, religion, rituals, norms of behavior such as law and morality, and systems of belief as well as the art.

Complex choices in life are made all the time. Choosing a partner with whom to share a long-term relationship will not always be made on the basis of sexuality. Other factors can also come into play like culture and tradition. With the best intentions of being true to oneself and to the partner, there are occasions when pressure from relatives and friends are forced upon individuals. Understanding the differences and enjoying them, tolerating and acknowledging them in others and accepting them in ourselves, can be a major step in living a harmonious and fulfilling life. But in Islam religion the case is different. Through Ramatoulaye, we become acquainted with a few tenets of Islam that we might not have known previously, such

a key difference between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims and the difference between that which is permitted (*halal*) and that which is forbidden (*haram*). Ann Oakley talks about the biasness in the Western view to the Islam view because in:

The Western view towards patriarchy and sexuality is normally considered a more liberal approach, where as in the Islam's world view in most of its related states is a conservative approach that is often implemented by force. Both these regions are heavily populated and both these areas have totally different views concerning patriarchal domination. (59)

So Long A Letter is a revealing portrait of the condition of women in a male-dominated Muslim society in Africa. It is also about children who are forced to go to work when they should really be going to school. Ramatoulaye highlights the quality of life of women like her against the yardstick of gender equality and liberation. She raises the issue about the oppressively traditional father, women under the pressure of tradition and filthy living conditions. Moudou is seen as an autocratic patriarch, marrying a girl young enough to be his daughter because religion sanctions it. Thus, he determines the fate of his sons, wives, and daughters. No one is allowed to exert any autonomy over their own life. Privacy, volition, emotions, expectations and dreams of a better future are elusive, almost non-existent concepts for anyone other than Moudou at his home.

Moudou has two wives and many children and this affects the family structure, plus, how it affects the two women. Though the women do not have to wear their *burkas*, they have to strictly follow other Muslim religious codes and habits. Moudou rules the house like a patriarchal head with a decidedly strict view for the role of women. In fact, it is through the women in his household that the reader is

drawn into how truly circumscribed and stultifying life is for African women. He rules his household as if it were a feudal property, with little thought, concern, or interest in the desires, hopes, and dreams of the members of his household, especially women.

Bâ details an African woman's struggle to regain her life following a heartbreaking sequence of events, primarily related to the effects of her religious faith. It is the kind of tale where we connect with the character so firmly that we must know what happens. For a short book Judie Newman says that it certainly touches on a lot of incredibly important issues. Bâ is skilled enough to highlight several feminist problems while allowing a story to unfold for the reader as:

The novel is a perceptive testimony to the plight of those articulate women who live in social milieu dominated by attitudes and values that deny them their proper place. It moves beyond Ramatoulaye and Aïssatou's individual stories to analyze the wider social, cultural, political and religious climate that encourages women to be thought of as disposable. (39)

But what Moudou does not draw from his understanding of his religion is the part where each of his wives is to be treated as equal. Ramatoulaye is left alone to provide for twelve children while her husband who is sworn by the laws of his religion to take care of them is trying to recapture his youth at the expense of an innocent young girl, Binetou. Therefore, the main protagonist of the novel, Ramatoulaye and her friend Aïssatou is deceived by bringing a second wife by their husbands. Though they are ill-treated by their husband and society, both are struggling against the societal attitudes in the hope of bringing the light of happiness in their life.

Being a divorcee and a modern Muslim woman, Binetou is active in women's

associations, promoting education, championing women's rights, and writing articles in local newspapers. She possesses a strong vision and determined commitment. She feels African people should reduce the impact of their culture. To say that there is a culture clash here is an understatement. For Binetou, the issue is how women and other vulnerable people are treated in African society. And indeed, much of the drama in her story comes from what she portrays as a woman abused by her husband.

The book does provide a penetrating look at a complex and complicated family forced to live under horrific conditions. Ba feels her story is of one family in Africa, but it is apparent that, she considers the situation of the women, a representation for the position of all women in Africa. Her greatest anger seems to be directed at the tradition of arranged marriages, which she refers to as the buying and selling of women, the treating of women as objects. In Moudou's household, the conflict begins with his decision to take a second wife, after 22 years of marriage with Ramatoulaye. Moudou picks out a sexy teenager Binetou, a friend of his eldest daughter. He must break with tradition and act on his own behalf, largely because he is a male in a patriarchal society. She becomes the representative of victimized womanhood under Islam.

Bâ feels the failure of African liberation struggles and movements. Life is a constant battle for many. Marriage, children, religion, illness, and death are everyday hassles for most individuals. However, Rosalie Otero writes that women often find these challenges to be particularly difficult due to the continuing oppression from society as a whole as:

The oppression of women occurs through a variety of channels, including religious faith. Through this novel her contribution is significant because she explains and describes the disadvantage

position of women in general and especially married women. The story of her life is fleshed out as the book deals much with women's relationships, with husbands, with children, with adult female relatives, and with friends. (9)

So Long A Letter adds to the growing body of literature that explores the situation of African women from historical, social, and cultural perspectives. Women's rights to freedom, to personal choices, whether in work or in marriage and to education in a country where the literacy rates for women are marginal, are certainly the subtext of the novel. Ba's greatest sympathies are with the women in Moudou's home. The women suffer greatly at the hands of Moudou, not least his first wife Ramatoulaye, who at the beginning of the book is subjected to the humiliation of a second wife entering her household. Binetou is an un-educated teenager, whom Ramatoulaye specifically must welcome into the family as her own. She must accept her as her equal, learn to adjust her life with her as long as she is alive.

The story is a denunciation of a society that systematically denies women their dignity and autonomy. Ba is hardly the first person to point out that women have suffered in African society. But her book is a reminder that the misogynist society is only an extreme manifestation of a basic reality. As in many traditional societies, African women remain structurally subordinate to African men, no matter which government happens to be in power. *So Long A Letter* is a portrait of one rather unhappy African family. Ba seems to be pointing out to the repression of African women and she seems to echo what Foucault says about repression as:

Repression is a concept used above all in relation to sexuality. It was held that bourgeois society represses sexuality, stifles sexual desire and so forth. This discourse serves to make possible a whole series of

interventions, tactical and positive interventions of surveillance, circulations, control and so forth, which seems to have been intimately linked with techniques that give the appearance of repression. (1139)

Moudou is a conservative man in a highly conservative society. As such, he is a polygamist and a man who forces his first wife to humiliation and mental torture. In this way, the novel depicts the condition of women in a patriarchal Muslim African society and culture. Therefore, we can say that *So Long A Letter* is a voyeuristic portrait of real people who live in an intensely conservative society that places a premium on domestic privacy.

Resistance Against Patriarchal Domination

The patriarchal society constructs a discourse that says women are naturally inferior to men. Women internalized this subordinate position and accepted their role to be meek and passive as their duties were to please men. They had to be useful to men and had to win their love. These were women's duties in ages and were taught to women from childhood. Women followed their duties set by patriarchal society without any question and they never tried to challenge it. The male structured society compelled women to think this was their destiny and women did not think necessary to revolt against this thinking.

But, feminism as a political movement awakened women about their miserable existence in the male governed society because of sex difference. By making conscious to the female about their precarious situation, this movement helped women gain not only in legal, political and economic liberties and equalities but also in sexual ones. The feminist movement awakened to the women that women will always remain subordinate to men unless inferiority of sexual concept is reconceived and reconstructed. Therefore, feminism studies women as people who are

either oppressed or suppressed or deprived of personal expression and freedom. All women writers who struggle against patriarchy in favor of womanhood are generally considered feminists. Today feminists have stepped forward against male dominance in order to enhance women's rights and to secure women's emancipation. They are proud of their femaleness and have made a vital tool to femininity to perceive their existence.

The feminists from the third world argue that oppression relating to the colonial experience, particularly racial, class, and ethnic oppression, has marginalized women in these societies. They challenge the assumption that gender oppression is the primary force of patriarchy. These feminists object to portrayals of women of non-Western societies as passive and voiceless victims and the portrayal of Western women as modern, educated and empowered. This form of feminism emerged from the gendered history of colonialism because colonial powers often imposed Western norms on colonized regions. They struggle to fight gender oppression within their own cultural models of society rather than through those imposed by the Western colonizers. They argue that cultures impacted by colonialism are often vastly different and should be treated as such. Colonial oppression may result in the glorification of pre-colonial culture, which, in cultures with traditions of power stratification along gender lines, could mean the acceptance of, or refusal to deal with, inherent issues of gender inequality. They react against both universalizing tendencies in Western feminist thought and a lack of attention to gender issues in mainstream postcolonial thought. Third-world feminism frame feminist theories developed by feminists who acquired their views and took part in feminist politics in so-called third-world countries. Although women from the third world have been engaged in the feminist movement, they criticize Western feminism on the grounds that it is ethnocentric and

does not take into account the unique experiences of women from third-world countries or the existence of feminisms indigenous to third-world countries.

The two women, Ramatoulaye and Aissatou have a deep-rooted friendship cultivated over many years of shared life experiences. They are from good, happy marriages. Both of them have several children and cope with the trauma when their long-term husbands reveal that they have taken young, second wives. Although polygamy is acceptable in Senegalese society, the two women are surprised by their husbands' actions. It is mostly because they have had meaningful relationships with their spouses and their reactions are markedly different. Talking about her intimate relationship with Aissatou, Ramatoulaye writes at the beginning of her letter:

Your presence in my life is by no means fortuitous. Our grandmothers in their compounds were separated by a fence and would exchange messages daily. Our others used to argue over who would look after our uncles and aunts. As for us, we wore out wrappers and sandals on the same stony road to the Koranic School. we buried our milk teeth in the same holes and begged our fairy godmothers to restore them to us, more splendid than before. (1)

In the novel, the women are colonized by the males. In letting one woman freely tell the anguish of her heartbreak, Bâ suggests that all women have important stories to tell and that their plight should be given a voice. These are the women who cannot represent themselves but must be represented, finds representation in this novel. They are defined by silence, sacrifice and service. It is about the oppression of female characters or of the African female race written as a long letter in an epistolary form. Therefore, *So Long a Letter* focuses specifically on Senegalese society and on patriarchy that controls women's lives.

Ramatoulaye and Aissatou: Struggle for Identity

Identity involves a link between the personal and the social relationships. Although as individuals we have to take up identities actively, those identities are necessarily the product of the society in which we live and our relationship with others. Identity provides a link between individuals and the world in which they live. Identity combines how we see our self and how others see us. Identity involves the internal, the subjective and the external. It is a socially recognized position, recognized by others, not just by us. There is some active engagement by those who take up identities and being the same as some people and different from others, as indicated by symbols and representations. There lies a tension between how much control we have in constructing our identities and how much control or constraint is exercised over us.

Other aspects of our personal identity are formed during our early years of development and continue to develop during our life as we grow, mature, make choices, forge relationships and build an evolving identity for ourselves. Richard Handler argues that there are multiple factors that contribute to the making of an identity:

Identities need to be analyzed not only in their cultural location but also in relation to historical epoch. Identity is an utterly unproblematic notion. But since these can be restated without the language of identity they are not problems about identity. Identities affect not only external elements of one's interior life as well, in relations to patterns of affect, belief, desire and experience. There is no single problem of personal identity, but rather a wide range of loosely connected questions. (49)

We may share personality traits with other people, but sharing an identity suggests some active engagement on our part. We choose to identify with a particular identity or group. Sometimes we have more choice than others. Identity requires some awareness on our part.

Personality describes qualities that individuals may have, such as being outgoing or shy, internal characteristics, but identity requires some elements of choice. We may be characterized by having personality traits, but we have to identify with, that is, actively take up an identity. We tend to have the same identity as one group of people and a different one from others. Identity itself seems to be about a question. Who am I? We tend to focus on three key questions when discussing about identity. How are identities formed? How much control do we have in shaping our own identities? Are there particular uncertainties about identity in the contemporary times? We need to think a bit more about what we mean by identity. If identity provides us with the means of answering the question 'who am I?' it might appear to be about personality. Identity is different from personality in important respects.

A person can have multiple identities and not be confined to a single one. In other words, throughout a lifespan of a person, he/she can have different forms of identity. To distinctly confine a person to a single identity in a multi dimensional world would be foolish. Therefore, Linda Martin Alcoff writes about the dynamic aspect of identity stating:

Identities need to be analyzed not only in their cultural location but also in relation to historical epoch. The constellation of practices, beliefs about identity, and the lived experiences associated with various identities, and the legal or formal recognitions of identity not

only undergo constant change but can produce truly new forms of identity. (3)

The link between our self and others is not only indicated by the connection between how we see ourselves and how other people see us, but also by the connection between what we want to be and the influences, pressures and opportunities which are available. Material, social and physical constraints prevent us from successfully presenting ourselves in some identity positions, constraints which include the perceptions of others. The subject, 'I' or 'we' in the identity equation, involves some elements of choice, however limited. The concept of identity encompasses some notion of human agency, an idea that we can have some control in constructing our own identities.

There are constraints which may lie in the external world, where material and social factors may limit the degree of agency which individuals may have. Other limitations to our autonomy may reside within us, for example in the bodies which we inhabit, as illustrated by the ageing process, by physical impairments, illness and the actual size and shape of our bodies. Due to patriarchal structure of society, women have been involved in an age long struggle of identity crisis. Their identity crisis has been the issue of several women writers all over the world. The bias society oppresses and suppresses women bitterly and obliges women to internalize their inferiority.

Ramatoulaye and Aissatou are still optimistic to form their identities struggling against the ill-treatment from the side of the society. This strong exploration of feminism is perhaps what makes the novel a strong voice for the oppressed woman in Africa. The woman is oppressed by culture and by virtue of her position Aissatou rejects this and slowly Ramatoulaye realizes she cannot look to her culture for much. It is a devastating attack, made all the more powerful because of the

intelligence and maturity of the narrator and the ability of Ba to honor two very different choices within one framework. Ramatoulaye reluctantly accepts her husband's betrayal. But inside she suffers, and through that suffering she gains strength and independence. Tamlyn Monson points out that this is an amazing, powerful story which manages to be simple and complicated simultaneously and remains true to its background throughout because:

She shows that not only men are important in this world. She also shows that to succeed in this life, we women should identify ourselves and also trust in us to overcome these multiple darkness that compose life. In showing the importance of women, their role in bringing up families and keeping them together in time of calamity is clearly brought out in the novel. This still is a powerful expression of the unheard voice of the previously silent woman in Africa. Bâ is actually calling on women to take responsibility for their lives throughout the novel. (31)

Ramatoulaye is a middle aged Senegalese school teacher and an educated Muslim woman. She is a mother, an abandoned wife and now a widow who adjusts to her changing roles with strength but sadness. She quietly accepts her husband's betrayal. But inside she suffers and through that suffering, she gains strength and independence. She and Aissatou's youthful debates about equality for women and for all Senegalese are tempered by the events of their later lives. For example, Ramatoulaye has managed to have a career outside the home.

But she has also been required to do everything that a housewife would have had to as well. She has had the burden of raising her twelve children which understandably leaves her exhausted and with little time or energy to spare. When she

brings up the issue with her friend and suitor the parliamentarian, he expresses the opinion that equal gender representation is hardly the most vital Senegalese dream that has failed to materialize as:

It's not easy to develop a country. The more responsibility you have, the more you feel it; the misery closes your heart and you can't take it on your own shoulders. This is about all misery, material and moral. We need money, a mountain of money that we must persuade out of others' pockets even while gaining their confidence. (29)

Ramatoulaye celebrates education as a force that brings disparate friends together, promotes tolerance and allows people greater flexibility in choosing their own destinies. Both the women are both highly educated who seem victimized by the traditional customs that deny women status equal to that of men. She relates that each woman is able to become successfully independent and neither accepts the position of submissive wife.

Her letter sets out to expose the double standards between men and women in her part of Africa. These two women come across as flawed but sincere who have strength and integrity. Both their husbands are weak, not able to face down their first wives or families. Even while cursing against her fate, she takes comfort in many traditional values. She hopes for a world where the best of old customs and new freedom can be combined.

But neither woman achieves happiness in their decision, as society is against them. The men virtually abandon their first wives for the younger brides. The new mothers-in-law plunder the family income to line their own and friends offer nothing much. What makes this particularly striking is that there is no sense that either husband is particularly immoral or appalling by the norms of society. Ramatoulaye

gets her first inkling of her situation when friends of her husband stop by to say, “Your husband won’t be home tonight because he married your daughter’s friend this afternoon and must consummate the marriage.” Thus, her letter is an extremely powerful look at the inequality between men and women in her society. The reality is that Ramatoulaye is speaking to us, the readers and convincingly writes:

I am not, in fact, the only one to insist on changing the rules of the game and injecting new life into it. Women should no longer be decorative accessories, objects to be moved about, companions to be flattered or calmed with promises. Women are the nation’s primary, fundamental root, from which all else grows and blossoms. Women must be encouraged to take a keener interest in the destiny of the country. (62)

The male behavior is based on sexual instincts and female continence and rationality. Mawdo, whom Aissatou has married and left, defends polygamy and tells of a film in which the survivors of an air crash eat the flesh of the corpses to stay alive. “You can’t resist the imperious laws that demand food and clothing for man. The same laws compel the male in other respects. I say male to emphasize the bestiality of instincts” (38). Ramatoulaye later warns her daughter that the existence of means of contraception should not lead to an unhindered release of desires and instincts. “It is through his self-control, his ability to reason, to choose, his power to attachment, that the individual distinguishes himself from the animal” (44).

Ramatoulaye reminisces and her outpouring of the heart is thoughtful, and considered. She is an intelligent woman, a devoted teacher who values and insists on educating her children, both girls and boys. Her letter depicts the reduced role of women, slowly coming into their own and highlighting the lack of equality for

women. She stays with her husband, who, despite her love and faithfulness, has fallen for a younger one. She puts up with it, while her friend cannot, divorcing her faithless husband.

Ramatoulaye is a representative among progressive Senegalese women who desire to take their lives into their own hands. It is the tact of balancing tradition and progress which is a difficult task. Even in their days of energetic youthful idealism, the two friends realize intellectually this difficulty. But the full emotional understanding does not come until they have experienced the desertion of their collaborators and the sustained difficulty of living their lives with one foot in the past and the other in the future. In this passage, Ramatoulaye remembers those early debates:

We were all in agreement that a good deal would need to be broken down in order to incorporate modernity in our traditions. Torn between the past and the present, we deplored the sweats that would be sure to come. We numbered the possible losses. But we felt that nothing would be as before. We were full of nostalgia, but resolutely progressive. (58)

Ramatoulaye looks back on the happy times she and her friend has in their married lives. She tells all about her struggles for survival all the while being ignored by her husband and her co-wife. Similarly, her friend Aissatou also is faced with her husband taking another wife. The former appreciates and respects her friend's decision in not staying with her husband while applauding her for her choices and success.

Hope for the Future

As feminism awakens women with the new idea to struggle against male dominated society to free women from male trap. By enlightening the female,

feminist advocated for emancipation and equality. This female awareness movement helps to change the condition of women. Ramatoulaye's healing strength comes through writing her letter to Aissatou. This story is about friendship, love and most important of all, hope. Her letter depicts postcolonial Senegalese society, especially the reduced role of women, slowly coming into their own. It deals with the liberation of women in a newly independent Senegal and also with the traditions that in fact bind them. The novel provides an example of the importance of female friendship to a woman's survival. Because the friendship means so much to her, Ramatoulaye names her daughter after Aissatou. It also very closely exhibits the close relationship between the opposition of races and the opposition of the sexes. As Ramatoulaye writes in her final paragraph:

Despite everything - disappointments and humiliations - hope still lives on within me. It is from the dirty and nauseating humus that the green plant sprouts into life, and I can feel new buds springing up in me. It is from the dirty and nauseating humus that the green plant sprouts into life, and I can feel new buds springing up in me. The word happiness does indeed have meaning. (63)

Ramatoulaye struggles with her newfound independence. She does not leave her husband. They do not divorce either, a fact which surprises her husband and irritates him. He never goes back to her, even though they are still married. She boldly suggests that abandoning a relationship is not easy or desirable, no matter the circumstance. Her friend Aissatou leaves as soon as her husband decides to take a second wife.

But, Ramatoulaye, to the dismay of her children, stays. She does not rebel against or reject her husband because of his actions. Her action, juxtaposed against

Aissatou's, leaves a lot to consider. It supports the idea that there is no right or proper answer to women's issues. There is not one trajectory path to follow. By no means did Ramatoulaye take the easy way out. Her decision did not give her peace. In fact, it takes her experiencing his death for her to forgive Moudou and find peace with what happens to her. As she adjusts to her new life, she appreciates even more the value of friendship:

Friendship has splendors that love knows not. It grows stronger when crossed, whereas obstacles kill love. Friendship resists time, which wearies and severs couples. It has heights unknown to love. The success of the family is born of the couple's harmony, as the harmony of multiple instruments creates a pleasant symphony. Friendship, imperfect as it may be in its content and expression, remains the natural link between these two beings. (88)

Ramatoulaye's story transcends cultural boundaries and speaks to the universal ideas of betrayal, heartbreak and emotional divorce. The continual suffering of her might be felt by anyone who has experienced severe emotional trauma, who has to live with the consequences day after day. Thus, we can see that even in the most traumatic situations, friendship can triumph. There is hope. It seems that women's shared experience can offer the greatest support necessary for recovery. As long as women can share their experiences with one another and support each other, situations such as these can be survived.

What is common to the distinctively different ideals of women is that in each case the ideal women is urged to forget, deny, or in some way negate herself. History is largely responsible for the plight of women in literature and society. As awareness gradually arises among women, they begin to come together for the benefit of all

women. Through Ramatoulaye's story, Ba aims to understand women's oppressions in terms of race, class, religion and sexual preferences. She attacks the notion of patriarchy to awaken women about the discrimination imposed upon them.

In a patriarchal social structure, a woman is deprived of actions and intentions. If she displays them, it is under the domination of male hegemonic ideology. She neither thinks nor acts on her own. And the refusal to ascribe her thoughts and actions is the refusal to give her the language. Therefore, basing my arguments and ideas on the theory of feminism, I have tried to explore how Bâ has tried to resist the patriarchal domination. A male dominated society always prevents the women from realizing their productive and creative possibilities and being a female writer, Bâ has tried to raise a voice.

Chapter III: The Valiant Ramatoulaye

The present research work analyzes *So Long a Letter* from a feminist perspective. Here, the term resistance has been used to describe the actions taken by Ramatoulaye and her friend Aissatou in a patriarchal dominant society. Their voices seem to be muted and their agency subdued. But, both these women with strong will and determination have been able to fight against domination in their respective ways. Their choices may be different but their target is the same. Ba invites the reader to see the different sides and roles people play in Ramatoulaye's life and leaves it for them to judge.

First and foremost, to pass the time during the mourning for her husband, Ramatoulaye writes a lengthy letter to her friend. She recollects about their lives, about the course of African independence, and about the role of women in West African society in the late 70s and early 80s. The things she writes range from little everyday happenings to memories of their common youth to commentary on the state and the development of the society. Ramatoulaye is a school teacher in her fifties trying to cope with pressures of dealing with a husband and twelve children. Both Aissatou and Ramatoulaye face the identical situation with their men. Each woman chose a different way to handle their new circumstances and resist patriarchal domination. Ramatoulaye, witnesses the suffering of her good friend, never thought it would happen to her, until the fateful day when she is informed that Modou has taken a second wife. This completely devastates her and then realizes that her life has fallen apart. In the letter to Aissatou, she seems to seek a justification of the betrayal caused by her husband. She also reflects back on the happy times she and her friend had in their married lives and then tells her all about her struggles for survival all while being ignored by her husband.

Secondly, this study finds that women deliberately sabotage the happiness of other women in a male dominated society. This is one of the major factors that have come to be a major focal point in her letter. The role of the mother-in-law in the process of abandonment conveys the impression that the primary culprit here is the woman herself. But, Ramatoulaye and Aissatou are champions of change and justice as they inspire other women and people to live and move on. Aissatou's sense of independence, justice, and responsibility is a significant factor in the transformation of Ramatoulaye, from a self-effacing to a self-asserting independent woman without sacrificing her charm and sense of responsibility. Aissatou rises out of her position to disprove oppressive culture. She comes across as a radical woman and an inspiration for Ramatoulaye. She takes her life into her hands and chooses to walk out of a polygamous relationship. She therefore acts as an inspiration for women suffocating under the whims of culture. Ramatoulaye is greatly inspired by her friendship with Aissatou and by her resolute behavior in the face of adversity.

Third, both women marry for love and have had happy, productive marriages. Both are educated, had work they loved and are intellectually alive. During their lives, both of these women's husbands chose to take a second wife. Each woman then made a different choice. Ramatoulaye decides to stay married, although it means rarely seeing her husband and knowing that he is wasting money on a young girl. She is a friend of her own daughter. Aissatou divorces her husband and eventually leaves the country, settling in the United States. Ramatoulaye is a clear representation of a woman struggling to free herself from the bondages of tradition. Whether the decisions each woman make for herself are correct may be left up to the reader, but the book nonetheless as a whole serves to communicate common experiences women around the world. In her letter, Ramatoulaye examines her life and that of other

women of Senegal, their upbringing and training and the cultural restrictions placed upon them. It is a devastating attack, made all the more powerful because of the intelligence and maturity of the narrator to honor two very different choices within one framework.

Her letter recounts the circumstances under which Ramatoulaye's husband leaves her five years earlier and takes a seventeen-year-old woman as his second wife. After his death, the husband's brother, again according to tradition, offers to make Ramatoulaye one of his own wives. His motivation is to gain control over the modest amount of money and property Ramatoulaye has acquired. She refuses his proposal and shows the reader how although a woman's experience and opportunity might have changed somewhat in the 20th century, it becomes clear how the hope, dream and disappointments of her mother's mother, her mother, and Ramatoulaye, herself, all entangle into each other. This study works as an advocate for the woman's voice, lies not in preaching or didactical posturing, but instead by a subtle demonstration of what actually happens. The study has shown that patriarchy has not diminished women's agency always through coercion. It has even ruled through their consent in the name of culture and tradition. That is to say, they have composed themselves in terms of male parameters of patriarchy.

Thus, the findings presented above have led to the conclusion that if women can, and have the will, they can resist patriarchy and male domination. Ramatoulaye and Aissatou have shown the way. In a way they are representative for millions of women who have been caught in the web of patriarchy. Through will and determination, they can overcome problems that they face. They even seem to protest against it. This research concludes with the suggestion that women need to be educated and strong willed to resist patriarchal domination.

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